Ask Not How the Money Is Spent, but Who it Can Defend

Capitol Punishment

By Art Buchwald

Post 11/9/72

Although the Republicans collected more than $40 million for the presidential campaign, they spent only $49.50, mostly for radio broadcasts by President Nixon. I had assumed that the unspent money would be returned to the contributors, but I was wrong.

Zachary Evans III told me the Republicans needed every dime they could get.

"What for?" I asked. "The election is over."

"We need it for a defense fund for all the people being accused of wrongdoing during the campaign."

"But I thought the Justice Department was going to defend anyone in the Republican Party indicted for a crime."

"That's where you're wrong," Evans said. "The Justice Department can defend only those people who are in the administration. The rest of the Republican employees will have to hire their own lawyers."

"But that's unfair," I protested. "The Justice Department should defend anyone who helped the President get elected."

"Unfortunately, the law says otherwise. In some cases the Justice Department might even have to prosecute Republicans for wrongdoing."

"That's impossible. How can Attorney General Kleindienst prosecute the people responsible for his holding his job?"

"It won't be easy," Evans admitted, "but sometimes even an Attorney General has to rise above politics."

"Surely you're not going to need $40 million to defend the Republican Party employees?"

"We're not certain on that. For one thing, we're not sure how much the other side is going to dig up. We want our people to have the best counsel that money can buy. The people who were involved in those activities were doing it for the good of the party, and they deserve our gratitude and our support."

"I would think you would write them off for being so stupid and inept."

"We thought about that," Evans admitted, "but if we don't defend them, they could become embittered and implicate other people who have not been mentioned so far. The purpose of the defense fund is to keep this thing from snowballing into the White House."

"I can see that," I said. "Yet I can't believe the people who contributed all that money for the President's campaign thought they were giving it to a defense fund for Republican workers who got into trouble."

"Our contributors do not ask how we spend their money. They know that whether we spend it on bugging or bumper stickers, we have their best interests at heart."

"Did you know when you first started the campaign that you would need such a large defense fund for your workers?"

"It was in the budget from the beginning. We had the choice of running a dull, uninspired campaign or a hard-hitting, devil-take-all race. We told our sabotage people at the time that no matter what they did we'd have a lawyer standing behind each one of them. That's the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats: When our people get caught we don't disown them.

"Besides, if we didn't back them this time, we wouldn't be able to get anyone to volunteer for our Secret Fund operations in 1976."

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